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SUBJECT: "BETTER THAN PRISON" - RWANDA'S POST-GENOCIDE  
COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM

1. (SBU) Summary: Evariste Bizimana, Executive Secretary for the Rwandan Travaux d'Interet General (TIG) National Committee, discussed the state of the community service program with emboffs on December 4. Approximately 45,000 people - referred to as "TIGists" - have been registered by the TIG National Committee and are either working as day laborers, as residents of one of 26 TIG camps, or awaiting TIG assignment. 100,000 persons may be participating in TIG by early next year. TIG projects are determined by districts and focus on environmental and agricultural development. A tour of Masoro TIG camp outside central Kigali revealed a minimum security work camp alternative to Rwanda's dilapidated prisons (whose populations are dropping steadily). Criticism has grown over the slow start of the program and the alleged poor work habits of the TIGists, but the real work of the TIG program is to transform those convicted of genocide crimes from inactive prison populations to community service participants. End summary.

2.(U) Bizimana explained to emboffs during their meeting on December 4 that so-called "TIGists" have two options. The first option is as a camp resident. Those who perform TIG as camp residents, housed in one of Rwanda's 26 camps, have their TIG sentences reduced by half. They are able to leave on weekends and can obtain permission to leave for short periods of time for other reasons. The other option is referred to as "in proximity." Individuals doing TIG "in proximity" live at home, serve their full TIG sentences, and report to the camp for work on weekdays, earning credit against their sentences for each day of work actually performed. Bizimana reported that, of the approximately 45,000 people currently registered with the TIG National Committee, 9,000 are in 26 camps (whose populations range between 300 and 1000 people), 23,000 are doing TIG "in proximity," and the rest await assignment. He estimated the program may have 60,000 TIGists by the end of the year, and perhaps 100,000 by early next year. (Note: Those who confess to gacaca offenses - the vast majority of cases - spend half of their sentence in TIG, the rest split between prison time and suspended sentences. End note).

13. (U) Bizimana said TIGists work eight hours a day, and receive reconciliation training in cooperation with the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. Those in the camps spend their evenings at rest or engaged in "leisure activities." The focus of TIG work, according to Bizimana, are district-level projects that provide environmental protection or increase agricultural production, such as

terracing of fields. He said coffee and macadamia nuts are among the crops planted by TIGists, with sale proceeds returned to the program. Each district in which a TIG camp is located determines projects for TIGists to undertake for the benefit of the district, with the TIG office contracting out the TIGists' labor. TIGists living "in proximity" to the camps join in the district projects. Eventually, Bizimana stated, there will be 60 TIG camps, two in each of Rwanda's 30 districts. Bizimana reported that private enterprises may also enter into memoranda of understanding with the TIG National Committee for contract labor. Private projects ran a greater risk of corruption, Bizimana acknowledged, as less monitoring would occur than in public projects, and TIGists could attempt to thwart daily performance monitoring through bribery or substitution of personnel.

¶4. (U) During the meeting, Bizimana spontaneously invited emboffs to the Masoro TIG camp, which was established in October in Gasabo District and is located a few kilometers outside central Kigali. About 1,000 individuals are serving TIG sentence at Masoro, said Bizimana. After showing emboffs several hundred TIGists working at terracing on a hillside below the camp, he led a tour of the facility, which included permanent structures -- staff offices, a large meeting room, an infirmary, a kitchen, showers and latrines -- and several dozen tarp-covered shelters for residents, as well as gardens and a soccer pitch. Facilities were clean and living spaces were relatively spacious and tidy. About two dozen women had their own facilities located across the camp from the men's tents. Nearly all camp inhabitants were absent on work assignments, but emboffs spoke with camp officials and with several TIGists, including one who had spent eight years in prison on genocide charges before coming to the Masoro camp. In the presence of Bizimana, the TIGist asserted that living conditions and food were "much better at the camp" than in

prison, and that residents had "greater freedom."

¶5. (SBU) Bizimana was recently called to the Senate to answer questions on the productivity of the TIGists -- there has been growing criticism of the slow pace of camp construction and the alleged poor work habits of TIG participants. A recent editorial cartoon in the government-affiliated New Times showed several TIGists leaning on shovels, chatting up young women, and sitting in the shade smoking cigarettes. However, Bizimana asserted that TIGists were being actively sought by many government agencies with public work projects to construct.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Although still overcrowded, Rwanda's prison population is dropping steadily as tens of thousands of Rwandans are sent home to serve their suspended sentences and community service first (with prison time an increasingly remote possibility, according to some observers). TIG now takes center stage as the focus of Rwanda's search for compensation and accountability for the 1994 genocide. Whatever the productivity of the TIGist labor force, the real goal of the TIG program will be to transform those convicted of genocide crimes from inactive prison populations to work camp and home-based participants in community service activities. End comment.

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